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Daily Bread

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Daily Bread

If we pray a blessing before eating a meal, bread might or might not be part of the food we are about to take. But, whether we have bread or not at any particular mealtime, the image of "Give us this day our daily bread" (The Lord's Prayer) has many possible resonances for us whenever we take a moment to reflect. If we have food available to us almost all the time we might take it for granted, and thereby miss some occasions for experiencing sincere gratitude.

During a typical day, we probably have many occasions for saying "thank you" to people, for any and all the services, kindnesses and ordinary interactions we have experienced. We have developed habits of expressing gratitude that serve us and others well. Life flows more humanely when we acknowledge one another with thankfulness, no matter how small the words or actions that elicit our appreciation.

Our interchanges with one another are usually visible, audible and tangible. But most of us do not see, hear or touch God in the same way as we do one another, and our "daily bread" comes from God in so many forms that we cannot possibly give thanks for them all. But gratitude is, as some would say, an attitude, and not some kind of overlay that would all but eliminate spontaneity. Rather, giving thanks to God often follows upon particular moments of joy that arise when we suddenly recognize that we have received a gift, and the person responsible is God.

Even if bread is not a staple in our diet, especially for those of us with specific allergies to certain grains, we all have memories of having been hungry that can remind us of how important food is, every day. A short time of not having food, whether deliberate on our part or forced by circumstances, enables us to revalue, if we had become somewhat unaware, of the significance of "daily bread" as signifying whatever we eat, as well as other daily necessities.

Few of us would think of consuming even a small loaf of bread, or anything like it in size, all by ourselves at one sitting. A loaf of bread, whether sliced or not, is normally shared by a number of persons at one meal, or kept for successive meals by a single person. "Daily bread" is of course a necessity for each one of us, but also for us as related to others. Few people want to live on bread alone as their diet, and hardly any of us want to take all our meals privately, alone. The Lord's Prayer has it: "Give **us**," not "me," which matches well the blessed reality of our mutual interdependence. We need one another not just for food, clothing, and shelter, but for all the small and extensive ways we care for one another.

When we pray a blessing at a meal, we can express gratitude for the food, of course, but we can also include in our minds and hearts, if not in words, those with whom we might be sharing it, and all those members of the civilization in which the food was grown, transported to us and prepared.

A highly recommended prayer that leads us readily to gratitude: "Give us this day our daily bread."